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SIPDIS

FOR DS CC, CA, WHA/CEN - ROIS BEAL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC SOCI PGOV CASC BH

SUBJECT: BELIZE: HAND GRENADE ATTACK LATEST ESCALATION OF GANG VIOLENCE

¶1. At least one teenager was killed and nearly a dozen more wounded, some critically, when an explosive, probably a grenade, was thrown into a group of youths Sunday evening, May 18. The suspect in the attack, who is still at large, is believed to be approximately 16. According to police the attack took place on Mayflower Street on the south side of Belize City, an area that has suffered from serious gang violence in recent months.

¶2. Police Superintendent Edward Broaster told DCM that the attack broke a relatively calm period and would likely lead to retaliation. Broaster said that the police and social services had had some success in recent weeks defusing tensions between local gangs arising primarily from disputes over drug turf. In the past police have responded to escalating violence by picking up gang leaders and known members and holding them for short periods to allow tensions to ease.

¶3. According to the National Security Ministry the grenade was a U.S. model believed to have come to Belize by way of Guatemala. Police recently arrested a Guatemalan national with three grenades which he was bringing from the border area to Belize City. Broaster said that police have intelligence that several cases of grenades are in Belize City but they have been unable to locate them.

¶4. COMMENT: This represents a serious escalation in the tit-for-tat gang battles that have left dozens of people dead so far this year. Most alarming to the authorities is the young age of those involved. No Americans were targeted in this attack and the area where it took place is a part of Belize City that is avoided by tourists. We have no indication that Americans are likely to become intentional targets if the gang war heats up in coming weeks, but the possibility of an American being in the wrong place when violence breaks out is always real. END COMMENT.

HILL